

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, February 15, 2005

CONTACT:

Lindsey Capps/Stark, 202-225-5065

Dean Peterson/Ramstad (202) 225-2871

Ernesto Anguilla/Kennedy (401) 729-5600

**LAWMAKERS TAKE ACTION TO END THE NIGHTMARE OF CHILD CUSTODY
RELINQUISHMENT**

Reps. Ramstad, Stark, and Kennedy Reintroduce Bipartisan "Keeping Families Together Act"

WASHINGTON -- In an effort to help parents obtain necessary mental health treatment for their severely emotionally disturbed children without being forced to relinquish custody, Reps. Jim Ramstad (R-MN), Pete Stark (D-CA) and Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) today introduced the "Keeping Families Together Act." Senators Collins (R-ME) and Pryor (D-AK) introduced identical legislation in the Senate.

"It is simply unconscionable that families are forced to choose between custody of their children and the mental health services they desperately need," Ramstad said. "No parent should face this impossible choice, yet too many families are forced to lose custody to save their children."

The "Keeping Families Together Act" would provide \$55 million in new family support grants to states that end the practice of child custody relinquishment. States would have the option to use these grants to improve access to mental health and family support services that keep families together; create statewide care coordination programs; or deliver mental health care and family support services to these families.

"Imagine your child in pain, suffering from mental illness," said Stark. "Now imagine that the only way to get them the health care they need is to give up your rights as a parent. As absurd as that sounds, many families today have to face that heartbreaking and damaging decision. In an alarming number of cases, middle class parents who cannot afford mental health care for their children are being faced with this nightmare."

This legislation is in response to an April 2003 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)

report requested by the three legislators. The GAO found that 12,700 children from 19 states were placed into the juvenile justice system to receive mental health treatment in 2001. The report recognized that the national problem is much larger since this survey was limited. The report can be accessed [here](#).

“When parents in America are forced to surrender their children to a bureaucracy as a condition for care, we have nothing short of a mental health crisis in our nation,” said Kennedy. “There are too many broken families in this country; the last thing we should be doing is creating more. This legislation will take some needed steps to counteract this unconscionable practice and I am gratified there is support for it in both chambers and on both sides of the aisle.”